

*Preservation is Progress
...may we be worthy stewards...*

Chautauqua Historical Society

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Fall 2007

- The Newsletter is published three times a year: winter, spring, and fall.
- The Newsletter is a membership benefit at the Piasa Bluffs Assembly and Patron members.
- PBA members have a membership in the Chautauqua Network.
- CHS members are encouraged to submit articles to the editor for inclusion in the Newsletter.

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*We have 13 PBA
and 30 Patron members,
and will send this Newsletter
to 160 households.*



Waterfall and Piasa Spring, a Chautauqua memorial, story on page 7.

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The President's message

I had a wonderful time this summer at the Chautauqua Network conference at Chautauqua, New York. I had an opportunity to talk with folks from other places around the country about

how they were preserving their community history. One topic was memorials.

There are so many areas around our Chautauqua grounds have memorials dedicated to special people who have been part of our community. Many types of memorials are represented - benches, trees, garden pieces, bookcases in the library, the Carillon, the rug in the Indian Giver, the furnishings of the Administration Building and much more. All of these memorials represent very special people, but through the years some are forgotten. Tree tags are lost, signs disappear and information is buried in New Piasa Board and LCIA records, old Program Books, the Channels and other publications, and some are just forgotten.

Last summer our Tuesday Archival group collected and recorded memorial information. We took the material we received and entered it into the computer. A printed copy of this information is in the archival collection at the Administration Building and the information is also copied to discs and placed in our new safe.

This is the way we hope to preserve our entire collection of Chautauqua history, storage of our priceless historical photographs and documents in a safe place and information entered into a computer program designed for historical preservation. The computer information is then transferred to discs and stored safely.

We need an Archives Center. We have outgrown the Ad Building and are looking at space on the second floor of the Kentucky Home. The Network meeting gave me a lot to think and dream about. The Chautauqua Institution Archives is located in the Oliver Archives Center, a new separate building constructed specifically to preserve their history. Mt. Gretna in Pennsylvania has just purchased a cottage and is redoing it into an archival building. In Lakeside Ohio the Lakeside Heritage Archives occupies an entire building devoted to research materials pertaining to the Mother Chautauqua, the Independent Chautauquas and the Tent Chautauquas. The Bay View Association in Michigan also has a wonderful building just for their archival history.

Here at NPC we have managed to preserve and collect many pieces that have been stored under beds and in basements and attics. We have accomplished much, giving us a feeling of great satisfaction. We want to move ahead. I hope every CHS member, every Chautauquan, will support our efforts to plans for an archival room where work can be done and there is safe storage space. I know there is so much more memorial information out there. It would be a shame if Chautauqua forgot a memorial to a family member or friend's history. Please write down what you know about a memorial and send it to me. I will be sure that your material is not only placed in the collection, but also entered into the computer data.

Rose Tomlinson

PRESERVATION IS PROGRESS

....may we be worthy stewards...

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The mission and purpose of the Chautauqua Historical Society is the preservation and enhancement of the historic traditions and culture of New Piasa Chautauqua, Chautauqua, Illinois, the encouragement of historical research on the Chautauqua community and nearby historic districts, the publication of historical brochures, pamphlets, and other written material on New Piasa Chautauqua, remaining permanent assemblies and chautauquas in other parts of the United States and the national Chautauqua movement, and the establishment of an educational program to inform the Chautauqua community and the general public of the historical and educational value of New Piasa Chautauqua.

We started an article in our February 2004 issue in the following manner:

Editor's Note: The foregoing is reprinted without typographical or grammatical change from *The Piasa Daily Chautauquan*, published from July 21 (first issue) to Wednesday, August 18, 1897. This was the first year of publishing a daily newspaper at Piasa Chautauqua, and this article appeared every day, apparently a "filler" piece.

.....you can see that one section is taken from Marquette's report of his visit to this area. It's clear, from this account, that Marquette and his party saw a representation of two birds, not one. We welcome your comments and other input, dear Readers....

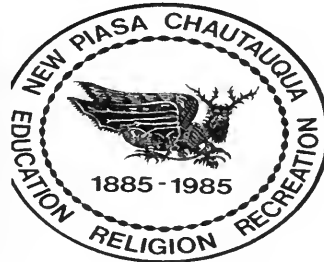
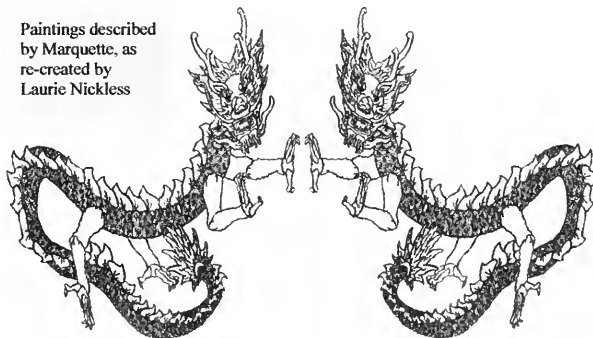
Long time Chautauquan and PBA member Phil Polster accepted our offer and provided an opportunity to suggest new information about the Piasa Bird, truly different information. The original account by Father Marquette described two figures; remember that fact.

Phil Polster suggested a book by Gavin Menzies, *1421, The Year China Discovered America*, published in 2002. Polster also gave an internet address for a short piece that focused on that part of Menzies' book that described Chinese exploration in the Mississippi River Valley, including the possibility that Chinese sailors were in our present Chautauqua area. (On your browser line, type in *Mark Nickless Piasa Bird*.) We believe Nickless is the author, but decided to go directly to the book, *1421*. It's a good read!

Menzies presents the following theory: Four large Chinese fleets were directed to sail from China and explore the world, far and wide, and did so, circumnavigating the world between 1421-23. Chinese explorers visited the Central Mississippi at this time. "Independent Research" from a group that could be called "The 1421 Society" suggests that what Marquette saw in 1673 was indeed two figures painted on the limestone bluffs, but not figures telling the story of a regional monster in Indian legend/lore, but Chinese dragons.

The "original" version of the mythical "devourer of men" monster is generally attributed to John Russell of Bluffdale, Ill., a professor at Shurtleff College in Godfrey. Russell's tale had the monster (one, not two, as described by Marquette) vanquished by a local chief, Ouatoga, who used himself as bait to trap the monster. Most of the literature available locally uses the Russell story to tell the Piasa Bird legend.

Paintings described by Marquette, as re-created by Laurie Nickless



An alternate explanation is provided by Mark Nickless and described in an "Independent Research" article connected to the 1421 group. Nickless claims, having read Menzies' book, the bird(s) are not birds at all, and there were two, as described by Marquette. If not birds, then what? Chinese imperial dragons, and more particularly the dragon motif favored by Huang Di, the famous Chinese "Yellow Emperor." Nickless finds eleven identical features in common for the Piasa Bird described by Marquette and Huang Di's imperial dragon. These commonalities include use of red, black, and green as (imperial) colors, the absence of wings, and a human-like face.

Nickless claims the original site of the painting was just above Elsah, at the site of the quarry that was opened in the 1850s by Colonel James Semple, and from which came the rock that built so many Elsah homes. One might argue, as an interpretive theory, the two imperial dragons painted at this Elsah site represented for these early Chinese explorers the power and force of the two great rivers coming together.

As we asked in 2004, what do you think, gentle reader? On your browser line, type in *Mark Nickless Piasa Bird*.

St. Louisans Take Charge of Establishment And Make Success of Vacation Venture, After Fire at Illinois Village

Some folks are never happy unless they have their fingers in a pie, 'tis said, and a certain group of St. Louis society women ran the risk of being accused of this, when they took over the management of the hotel at Chautauqua, Ill., this summer.

However, if they did poke their fingers in a pie, like the Little Jack Homer, they pulled out a plum, and are entitled to as much appreciation as this aforementioned youth of the Mother Goose tales. The plum they extracted took the form of a gain of nearly \$3000, and the satisfaction of having provided facilities for the many persons that frequent this village on the Mississippi.

Visitors to this place gazed hard at certain young girls and women whom they were positive they had met at one of the country clubs or exclusive social functions during the winter, yet who were then dishing up chicken salad behind the counter at the cafeteria or making change at the cashier's cage. But when they found that the Ladies' Civic Improvement Association...is made up of these women and that they were going to do some civic improving, if they had to do it with their own hands, the mystery was solved.

The story began last year when the Inn at Chautauqua burned. After that there was not hotel at the place, and the women who owned cottages there and spend their vacations there thought there should be one. Mrs. G. V. R. Mechin, 5088 Raymond avenue, was elected President of the Board of Directors (LCIA), and with \$1400 borrowed from the management at Chautauqua the women took hold of an old residence which they transformed into the Spring Hotel.

Each woman took one of the rooms and furnished it. That's the reason for the names over the doors of the rooms, where ordinary hotels have numbers. One of the rooms downstairs was given over to a place where story telling and fancy work classes were held. With the common interest all felt in the place it became a comfortable center for the whole Chautauqua village. Miss, who, during the winter is dean of Jubilee Hall at Lindenwood College, was the hostess of the hotel. But \$1 per

day was charged for the rooms, yet so successful was it that \$1500 was cleared.

But the hotel, once equipped and well started on its career, needed little attention from the women. What at times put everything else out of consideration was the cafeteria. For it, when the boat with supplies from St. Louis didn't bring them, all the cottages were searched for the necessary eggs or butter or fruit.

For it, the handsome cars of the folks who stayed there were appropriated for trucks to haul produce from nearby farms. And for it the women would go into the kitchen



and cut ham or bread or wash dishes, perhaps in their best frocks, if the call came at a time when they were inadvertently "dressed up."

Mrs. Mechin tells about the night of the Fourth of July, when the dishwasher was dismissed because he was in such an intoxicated condition that he couldn't have washed dishes, anyway, and how she and her son and daughter washed dishes until midnight. On another occasion, when there were no eggs in the larder of the cafeteria, everyone donated eggs from their own supplies until four dozen had been gathered and were available for breakfast the next morning.

When servants gave notice, an "S.O.S." was sent over the grounds and the men as well as the women responded.However, some times husbands of certain women objected to the labor which the women did when they were supposed to be taking a rest at this resort. And then these women were excused from active duty—until the husbands returned to St. Louis on business. The pretty young girls were used as "decoys" to loiter around the line which formed when all could not get into the cafeteria at the same time, and kept the people in good humor.

Continued on next page.

Despite the fact that the women made enough money to pay back the \$1400 loan, paid the rent, amounting to about \$400, and cleared \$700 besides, \$200 of which accrued from an auction sale of produce at the end, the meals were priced reasonably and the costs of a day's food totaled only about \$1.50.

Mrs. E. G. Lasar could be seen every morning outside the cafeteria door, writing on the blackboard the menu, the various dishes to be served, and the price of them. Mrs. Lasar was the Chairman of the Cafeteria Committee. Mrs. C. A. Truitt of 5500.....(Mrs.) Charles Newcomb...the treasurer, and frequently acted as the cashier, as did Mrs. Louis G. Kurtzeborn of 5938 Cates avenue, assistant treasurer. Mrs. R. H. Macy of East St. Louis was assistant manager, and Mrs. Christian Bernet, 17 Windermere Place, and Mrs. S. S. Pingree, 43 Washington terrace, also members of the board.

"If it hadn't been so much fun we would have died," said Mrs. Mechin on her return to St. Louis Thursday after closing up the affairs at Chautauqua, Sept. 1.

"As it was we laughed at difficulties, worked in close cooperation, serving without any salaries, paying for our meals at our own cafeteria, and closed the season warmer friends than when we started."

The Springs Hotel was torn down in 1969. It had ceased to be a hotel long before its demolition. Its perceived lack of functionality was probably an important factor in the decision to tear the building down. The razing occurred 13 years before our community was given *Historic District* status. It does represent, however, an instance in which the community decided not to preserve an historic building, one that had a rich and complex heritage. Not long ago a similar decision was faced by the community, what to do about the Kentucky Home. Fortunately, the community chose the path of *preservation*, and, with a combination of restoration and adaptive re-use principles, created a space that has become a focal point for community activity during the season.

The Historical Society played an important role in the development of the "new" Kentucky Home. We hope soon to come to the community with further ideas about this important historic building.



Chautauquas in the 21st Century

Not long ago I had a conversation with NPC President Bill Jackson in which he told me about contacting folks at the Monteagle Sunday School Assembly and asking for a copy of their annual program. The MSSA is located in Monteagle, TN. It has called itself the "Chautauqua of the South" for well over one hundred years, founded in 1883. Bill was surprised to learn this last fact, he told me. He had thought our New Piasa Chautauqua was the second oldest Chautauqua.

Not so, I told him. We are far from the second oldest, even among the remaining 11 permanent assemblies. Present day, **we are the seventh oldest Chautauqua still conducting an annual program.**

Most of what we know about the other chautauquas comes from the "Mother" site, and from our contacts in the Chautauqua Network. The Network meets once a year at a different site each year. The 2007 meeting was in New York. The 2008 meeting will be at the Monteagle Sunday School Assembly in Tennessee.

Rose and Tim Tomlinson attended the 2007 Network meeting in New York. It was Rose's second conference and the third for Tim. They have also visited each of the 10 other remaining permanent assembly sites at one time or another in the past four years.

This year's New York meeting was different from other recent meetings because, in part, the attendees included general members and officers of the other sites and permanent staff from some of the larger institutions. This was true for the Lakeside Chautauqua, the Colorado Chautauqua, Ocean Park Chautauqua (in Maine), Bay View, and of course, the Chautauqua Institution. We had an opportunity to listen to Directors and Executive Directors and Accountants and Business Managers and lawyers, all paid staff.



Porch gladiolas are everywhere in sight when you walk the grounds of the Chautauqua Institution in New York and the Bay View Assembly in Michigan.



Porch life is inescapable when your cottage has this many porches. Photo taken at the Chautauqua Institution, Chautauqua, New York, July 2007.

We had an opportunity to listen to hiring practices, rental and membership policies, risk management problems, whether alcohol could be consumed at public events and/or in restaurants, and so on. Still, there was time to discuss programs, the role of religion, and the primacy of activities for children and family. What we learned again that the 21st century Chautauquas are very different from one another, and, at the same time, very much alike.

Piasa Bluffs Assembly members of the Chautauqua Historical Society are automatically enrolled as members of the Chautauqua Network, and receive a bi-annual Newsletter from the Network and an invitation to the annual conference. The tentative dates for the 2008 meeting at Monteagle are July 17-20. There is a registration fee for the conference that includes daily gate charges and most meals. "Cottage stay" is encouraged, where you are the guest of a local cottage owner on the grounds. The schedule includes special Network meetings and an opportunity to participate in the host's program. Why not consider making a summer visit to Monteagle your first Chautauqua Network conference? Talk to Rose or Tim for further information.



Monteagle Cottage

Memorials and a sense of history

New Piasa Chautauqua is a close, tightly knit community, and, over the course of more than a hundred and twenty seasons, has developed a keen sense of who we are and what we are and what our place means. A sense of history asks that we remember, that we pay attention to the past. Communities do that by the memorials they create, their reminders of the past. Towns are named after founders, as are parks, streets, arenas, public buildings, colleges and universities, and so on.

Perhaps the most visible and dramatic memorial on our grounds is the *Osborn Memorial* complex, pictured on our cover, and rising above the historic Piasa Spring. Ralph Osborn provided leadership and inspiration for this project, and was the principal donor. Bill Cann presented an architectural sketch approved by Osborn and the NPC board, and work was completed in 1967 and dedicated on July 2, 1967. Osborn tells us in his *Centennial History* that he hoped the project would inspire others to make memorial gifts to the community. The centennial stone was dedicated in 1985; a rose garden (long gone) was installed two years later.



Other major physical sites include **Flint Park**, named for the Flint family connected to and influential at Chautauqua for almost a hundred years; Schwaninger Field, named for Earl Schwaninger, father of David Schwaninger; the swimming pool named for Joe Meisel in 1988; and, the Shuffleboard pavilion in honor of William Niegarth, president of the Board in 1944-45.

The historic auditorium is not named, nor are most of the other public buildings. An exception is the Administration Building, named in honor of **Joseph Rain, Sr.** The Chapel is named for **Emma Kupferle**, who was a leading force in raising the funds for its construction. It is rarely referred to as the "Kupferle Chapel." A number of memorials are connected to the Chapel. The twelve stained glass windows in the main section

are all named as memorials, and there are three additional windows in the small room at the northwest annex of the building. Two white wicker fern stands are memorials to Maxine Allen, given by her husband, Bob Allen, who gave also the six concrete urns that decorate the front steps of the building. Memorials take many form—the Sunday school songbooks were given in memory of Eula Rain. Gordon and Betty Grundmann gave the large painting on the rear south wall, in memory of Betty's uncle, Milton Frenzel, the artist. Tom Hagemann donated the concrete bench near the Chapel, in memory of his sister, Betty Hagemann Grundmann.

Other benches are part of the memorial system. A small Vermont granite bench all Chautauqua men and women who have served in our military forces. Betty Hattery gave a bench in memory of her husband, Paul, the bench located above the entrance to the Boardwalk. A bench set in the Playground and comprised of three sections of Vermont granite is in memory of David Miller.

The Ladies Civic Improvement Association has led the way in creating and caring for many of the memorial settings and artifacts in our community. The LCIA have been very active over the years in planting memorial and commemorative trees, adding beauty to the community landscape. Several such trees are planted in the Remembrance Garden, adjacent to the Willman cottage. Only a few trees in the community

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Continued on page 8

Continued from page 7



Joe A. Meisel Jr.
Memorial
SWIMMING POOL

When the pool at Chautauqua was rebuilt in the 1950s, it was dedicated to John M. Horner. The pool was re-dedicated in 1989 to the memory of Joe Meisel, a long-time and beloved resident of the community. The "Gazebo Swing" (picture right) in the LCIA Memorial Garden was given to Chautauqua by friends of Jean Chevalley. Jean's son, Larry, made a generous contribution in support of the swing. It was designed by Tim Tomlinson and built by a Richard Mosby, a local craftsman/woodworker.



The Gazebo below is on St. Louis Circle, dedicated to the memories of Betsy Schaeffer, daughter of Charles and Ann Schaeffer, and Chuck Manion, son of Bob and Sally Manion, and later, the Manion's granddaughter Allison. The stone bench is located near the Playhouse on the Playground, and is dedicated to the memory of David Miller. The bench is formed by three naturally fitting pieces of Vermont granite. The Playground Playhouse is a memorial to Pauline Cochran and Francis Fine-Allen, Janet Schwaninger's maternal grandmother and paternal grandfather, respectively.



Our Archival Project team will work again next season to move forward the recovery of lost information about memorials. We will need the support and cooperation of many of you. Think of this as a volunteer activity, one that requires only that you search your memory for information that is probably lost to New Piasa Chautauqua. The idea of memorials goes beyond named buildings, trees, and benches. Consider this: the wallpaper and vinyl flooring in the Library was given by Helen Margaret Thatcher in memory of her mother, Cornelia Duhadway; 4 bookcases were purchased from gifts to the LCIA in memory of Dorothy Buerkle; the Bible on the piano in the Chapel was given by the families of Bill Grundmann and Gordon Grundmann in 1992, in memory of their mother, June Grundmann. The Carillon that provides beautiful music every day to Chautauqua was given by Barbara Mennell in memory of her parents. The list can go on and on. Help us make it grow. Let us know what you know.



